

RURAL VIOLENCE IN COLOM

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Banditry and other outbreaks of violence in rural areas of Colombia, which have caused an estimated 250,000 deaths over the past 12 years, have recently increased following a two-year decline. This unrest springs largely from a complex of agrar-

ian grievances, regional rivalries, and sharp party antagonisms, but Communists and pro-Castro elements are actively endeavoring to exploit it.

Disputes between factions and parties have paralyzed local governments, impelling many Colombians to take justice into their own hands and destroying respect for law and order in the areas of violence.

About 21,000 of Colombia's 35,000-man

BACKGROUND

A half century of representative constitutional government in Colombia was interrupted in 1948 with widespread rioting sparked by the assassination of a popular leftist Liberal leader. Subsequent bitterness between the Liberal and Conservative parties was reflected in rural violence and banditry which the Rojas military dictatorship of 1953-57 was unable to control. A constitutional system adopted in early 1958 gives the two parties parity in appointive and elective offices at all levels and alternates the presidency between them at four-year intervals until 1974. The system now is faltering, largely because of factional rivalries within the parties.

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PART II

NOTES AND COMMENTS

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army and 8,000 of its 26,000-man national police are assigned to violence areas, but they have been unable to suppress the guerrillas. Improved police measures and limited rehabilitation programs for ex-guerrillas had improved the situation to some extent, but interparty and intraparty bickering have stymied congressional action on much-needed reform legislation to improve the basic causes of unrest.

The Colombian Communist party, which has an estimated membership of 7,500 and has had legal status since 1958, has had some success in exploiting peasant unrest. Communist guerrillas have for some years had absolute control over the Sumapaz and Viota regions



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tax and agrarian reform legislation. A substantial worsening of rural violence now would undermine Lleras' pres-

tige--particularly in view of his pledge to solve this complex problem--and aggravate tensions within the government.
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